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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT STANDS UP TO ACTIVISTS ON
BIOTECH STANCE

1. Following the recent passage of a World Conservation Union resolution recommending a moratorium on the further release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), South African anti-GMO activist groups Biowatch and African Centre for Biosafety blasted the Government of South Africa for its failure to support the resolution, claiming the government was kowtowing to multinational biotechnology corporations.

2. Local media quoted Director General of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Dr. Crispian Olver's explanation of the government's position: "The government could not support the call because it was not properly phrased or thought through. We want the IUCN to focus on building up a scientific base. Making rash calls like this undermines the IUCN's credibility."

3. Comment. The SAG speaks from experience. It has a national biotech strategy and science-based biosafety regime in place, and has approved several varieties of genetically engineered commodities for commercial planting in South Africa. The government also supports significant programs in biotech research, development and commercialization. Success of a locally-developed product would go a long way towards quelling the anti-GMO lobby's protests, which center on the dominance of multinational corporations in plant biotechnology. FRAZER